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Humboldt, Wilhelm von:

Essays on language / Wilhelm von Humboldt. Ed. by T. Harden
and D. Farrelly. - Frankfurt am Main ; Berlin ; Bern ; New York ;
Paris ; Wien : Lang, 1997

ISBN 3-631-50020-3

NE: Harden, Theo [Hrsg.]; Humboldt, Wilhelm von: [Sammlung
<engl.>]

Translation:

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ISBN 3-631-50020-3

US-ISBN 0-8204-3155-9

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Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften

Frankfurt am Main 1997

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Printed in Germany 1 3 4 5 6 7

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ON THE NATIONAL CHARACTER OF LANGUAGES (FRAGMENT)

(1822)

In one of my earlier lectures I sought to draw attention to the fact that the difference between languages involves more than just a difference in signs. The words and combination of words both form and determine the concepts in a language; and different languages, when examined in context and in their influence on man's knowledge and inner life, in fact constitute different views of life.^{1E}

In another lecture I examined the structure of languages to find the stage at which creative writing and academic research acquire clarity and independence, and I thereby established the requirements to be met by all languages irrespective of their particular characteristics.

I should now like to build on this basis by examining languages at the point at which they are capable of embarking on the most profound and subtle aspects of intellectual endeavour, but I should also wish to take account of the individuality with which all languages, in their different ways and using their inherent qualities, subsume into the spirit the reality which is common to them all.

It scarcely needs to be mentioned that individuality is unity in variety. It only becomes noticeable when, in the qualities which serve to distinguish one language from another, one detects a uniformity whose cause and effect are identical in nature. However, a genuine intellectual uniformity can only be present in languages which have already reached a relatively high level of development.

The investigation of this individuality, and even its precise definition in a given case, is the most difficult task confronting research into language. It cannot be denied that, up to a certain point, this individuality can only

^{1E} Humboldt's intention is not to propagate linguistic relativism, but to find a perspective which enables us to understand how the human mind creates language. One of the instruments is, as he says later on, the meticulous analysis of languages which "sheds light on the way in which man creates languages". Such an analysis - according to Humboldt - reveals the forces and the functions of the human mind which give languages their grammatical structures. (Cf. Liebrucks 1965:325)

be sensed, not demonstrated, and one might therefore ask whether all consideration of it should not in fact be excluded from the sphere of the scientific study of language.

There are two relatively indisputable advantages in meticulously analysing the structure and constituent parts of the individual languages: the analysis sheds light on the way in which man creates languages and is the only means of providing conclusive evidence of the origins of languages and nations.

There is no need at this juncture to say anything further about the latter of these tasks, and until now it has always been attempted to solve the former by using philosophical methods. This is not to be condemned; on the contrary, this course will still have to be followed in future alongside the historical approach, for any neglect of pure thought will always perceptibly take its toll throughout man's scientific endeavours. What was unfortunate, however, was that this philosophical investigation was at the same time supported by reference to what at times was an incomplete collection of facts, with the result that, in the majority of attempts at a general study of grammar, much that was half-true, and certain things that were obviously wrong, were intermingled with what was unquestionably correct.¹ An historical study can admittedly never guarantee complete results, and hence experience cannot replace pure thought in any of the fields in which the latter is appropriate. But it is quite a different matter when the whole mass of historical knowledge rather than a mere part of it is assembled, for it is the extent and range of experience which determines the degree to which it is generally valid.

Through the comparative study of language we must demonstrate historically three different features:

1. the ways in which each language fulfils the different tasks arising from the need for speech. On the one hand, we have the grammatical problems, or, more precisely: what view does the language give of the parts of speech, taking these both individually and combined? What

¹ I need only refer here to what has often been asserted concerning the sequence in which the different parts of speech evolved, whereby some consider the noun, others the verb, to have been the original part of speech, with the pronoun imagined as a relatively late development; this ignores the fact that originally noun and verb were not in any way distinguished grammatically, and that the verb only developed from the linking of the pronoun to what was still a grammatically hybrid word.

outline, even if the exact contours remain impossible to describe accurately, and to perceive so many points which determine the direction of this impact, that those elements which resist precise depiction can nevertheless be sensed and imagined to a certain extent. The desire to attempt this is all the more difficult to resist, when one considers that the painstaking accumulation of the countless details presupposed by the investigation of any language is only truly rewarded by these loftier considerations.

The characteristic qualities of nations and ages are so intimately intertwined with those of the relevant languages that it would be wrong to attribute to the latter something which entirely or for the most part is a feature of the former, and to which languages can only react passively. Even individual writers, employing the same words and the same formulations can give new character to the language in their works through the powerful inspiration of their mind and the different ways they use language. It remains nonetheless true, however, that:

1. through the influence exerted upon it, the language acquires an individuality which actually becomes its character, in so far as it in turn has an effect through that character, and in so far as it can only be used unproblematically within the limits of that character;
2. its own influence is all the more decisive, as it is through language that the vast products of entire ages and nations have an effect on the individual, who can do little to resist this influence, because his own individuality has been attuned to it by the uniformity in the causes of the influence;
3. in so far as the particular qualities of individuals can, as we suggested above, give new character to languages, such a capacity for further development also belongs to the original character of a language;
4. as all sequences of cause and effect are constant series in which each point is determined by a preceding one, and as our historical reference works always take us to the middle but never to the beginning of such a series, every single language of the nation to which we attribute such a series has already been handed down to us in a certain form with distinct words, forms and combinations, and this has already made an impact on the nation, an impact which is not simply the influence of a language it

means does it use to indicate grammatical concepts, e.g. agglutination, inflexion, modification of sounds, etc.? Which sounds does it choose for its purpose: only particular ones, as with the so-called 'servile' sounds in Arabic, or all sounds? And which in any individual case? On the other hand, we have the lexical functions: how do words derive from others with regard to the sounds of the words? What way of understanding the meaning of words dictates how concepts are derived from other concepts? How are words related to concepts? Does each word exhaust the potential of the concept allotted to it, or does it also embrace several related concepts? What recognizable link, if any, is there between the sounds and their meanings?

2. the ways, and also the areas, in which the languages whose development we can follow over a long period have undergone internal changes;
3. the differences in the formation and linkage of words which are compatible with the varying degrees of affinity (close or distant) which can exist between languages with a common origin.

There is no doubt but that the systematic compilation of all the facts provided by the living and dead languages known to man, which might answer the questions we have raised here, is an undertaking which is both possible and important. It must even precede the establishment of an accurate family tree of languages, as it alone enables us to determine the similarities, and the type and extent of such similarities, which justify any assumption that languages have an identical origin.

The historical study of language has yet a further use, (the difficulties of which have already been mentioned in our earlier comments), namely, the investigation of the individual way in which languages influence thought and feeling.

I have never thought that such difficulties should keep me from dealing with this subject. The question as to whether languages exercise a particular form of intellectual influence, and whether and by what signs this form can be recognized in languages, cannot be overlooked if the study of language is not to renounce the search for insight into its most noble and important dimensions. A valid perspective on dynamic forces must inevitably cut off the hope of an exhaustive description of these forces in their individual impact. Yet it is possible to come so close to the general

has arbitrarily acquired, but one which represents the original language for that particular nation;

5. if one thinks of nation and language together, the latter has an original character which has fused with the character it acquired from the nation. Of course not even here, least of all from an historical point of view, may one assume some fixed point in a nation's development at which it receives its language, for the development of nations is only a constant line of progression such that it is no more possible to conceive of the starting-point of a nation than it is that of a language. But nowhere in our knowledge of history do we find evidence that any nation ever existed in advance of its language, i.e. that any language was formed solely by the nation to which it belongs. As a result, there is an original core and a derived element in every language. However, in the case of languages whose origins lie in the darkness of past ages, this combined, twofold character of the language can no longer be ascertained. But where languages, such as those which derive from Latin, have arisen by processes of change and intermingling - developments with which we are more fully acquainted - and where, as in this case, the literature of the earlier languages influences the later ones, then the distinguishing of common and particular features becomes both straightforward and important.

Thus without confusing the contributory causes, one can discern an individual quality in languages which is genuinely their own or at least becomes their own. Not to consider the mark which national character leaves on languages would be to misunderstand their innermost essence and significant diversity. One would equally be overlooking the subtle yet deep affinity between the different forms of intellectual creativity and the peculiar style of any given language, if one did not attempt to explain how and why each language prefers to adopt the one or the other creative mode. Only when one links together in one's mind the character of the nation in all its modes of expression which are unconnected to language, - those which are independent of the subjective individuality, those which reflect the various processes of thought and activity, and also those which languages possess and can adopt - can one approach an insight into the diversity and unity which embraces the infinite and inexhaustible totality of human striving.

The Greeks with their refined sense of language were so keenly aware of the close connection between types of literature and forms of language that, even when popular appeal had ceased to be the motivation, every work was performed in its own specially allotted dialect. The impact of the character of the language is vividly demonstrated and exemplified here, for if the roles are interchanged, if epic writing is imagined in the Doric dialect or lyric writing in Ionian, one immediately feels that it is not the sounds that have been changed, but the spirit and the essence. The more refined prose would never have been able to blossom fully without the Attic dialect, and the development of this dialect together with its curious affinity with Ionian is consequently one of the most important events in the history of human thought. For prose in the highest sense of the word can scarcely have existed before or independently of the Attic dialect, and it is only through it and as a consequence of it that the form of prose developed, which the human mind required for its most noble and free evolution. However, this deserves and demands a separate study which must be reserved for subsequent investigations.

I have so far attempted to establish the fact that, and the extent to which, languages possess a character. It is to be found primarily and in its most complete and pure form in the living use of speech. This, however, disappears with the speakers and listeners, and we must therefore limit our study of the character of languages to that which is preserved in its works of literature or, where there are none of these, in its structure and constituent parts. In the strictest sense of the word, the character of languages must be understood as that which they originally possessed or which they assimilated at such an early stage that it had a conditioning effect on the generation of speakers for whom it was to a certain extent foreign.

By virtue of this character, however, languages have an effect far beyond that of the generations of the nations to which they belong, when sooner or later, and often when already defunct, through their literary works or even simply through a knowledge of their structure they come into contact with other languages. Their mutual influence is thus twofold: an unconscious influence, in that they communicate their essence and character to the languages derived from them, and a further influence that grows in proportion to the depth and lucidity of man's consciousness when they become an object of study for nations whose languages were

formed elsewhere, or when they become actively linked to such languages.^{2E} In their original structure, Greek and Latin, to mention only these two languages at this point, have Old Indian to thank for their capacity to give felicitous expression to every thought. But this link had come about in the way in which nature always functions, even when preparing for the highest of human achievements: it had been shrouded in darkest night and would have been lost to history, had it not been for the settlement of European nations on Indian soil, and although the acquaintance with this language was not a particularly important consequence for the worldly aspirations of the nations who were responsible for the settlement, it may well have had the most lasting consequence for the expansion and heightening of man's thought. We suddenly encounter an ancient world which, in terms of its expressiveness and character, was far ahead of the ancient Greek world; we are gripped by the dignity of intellectual attitude, the resolute steadfastness of profound contemplation and the magnificent wealth of description of nature always presented in great abundance. But one may trust that in time a second influence will be added to the powerful one which the Old Indian language has exerted on present day scientific progress through the historically obscured link both with the German language and with classical languages to which German owes a large part of its development. If Indian literature and language become as well known to us as Greek, which can scarcely fail to be the case in view of our present desire for knowledge, then the character of both will, on the one hand, leave its mark on our treatment of our own language, on our thinking and creative writing, and, on the other hand, both provide us with a powerful aid to the expansion of the sphere of ideas and help in the search for the diverse paths which lead man to become acquainted with that sphere.

When viewed from this angle, the difference between languages acquires a relevance to the history of the world. The convergence of diverse individual qualities provides man's thought with new forms which influence future generations; the power and the sphere of ideas grow in harmony

^{2E}The character of languages - as Humboldt understands it - must not be confused with their grammatical structure. It is a phenomenon which is difficult to define and is somehow spiritually present in the speaking individuals of a language. But it is also present in the words which are spoken by those individuals and can thus be retrieved or rather resuscitated when reading texts in a language of which no speaker exists anymore. (Cf. Liebrucks 1965:221f)

and become the common property of anyone who endeavours to find a way through to them. As long as violent upheavals do not break this chain, which, century after century links together the thoughts, and to a great extent also the sentiments, of nations, then there is no loss of the old in the process of absorbing new additions; and this progression, no less than the very processes of thought and feeling, knows no bounds.

Every human institution has a pinnacle it would be vain to try to surpass, because the goal has already been reached; but the idea underlying such an institution can be thought and experienced ad infinitum in a purer and more complete form and in further diverse contacts with other ideas. One could think for example that the abolition of slavery - which began at the moment when, with the spread of Christianity, the wall dividing nations disappeared and a general brotherhood of man arose - might one day be completed throughout the whole world. There would then be nothing more to add to this institution; and yet the inner appreciation of man's liberty, based on the recognition of that quality of human nature on which the right to freedom is founded, cannot come to an end in its growth nor in its recognition of such a quality.^{3E}

In the actual sphere of thought, however, language works in such a way that it is impossible for thought to come to a stop once a certain point is reached. The nature of language cannot determine the investigation of truth nor the establishment of a law whereby the intellect seeks to provide a fixed limit, but it does determine the mood in which man develops the totality of his inner powers; and as he strives for an infinite goal, it accompanies him by providing stimulation, courage, and strength.

Hence the progressive interaction of mind and language is neither to be confused with the advance in social institutions and the resulting development towards moral perfection, nor with the advance in science and art, however closely it may be linked to either. The intrinsic gain which accrues from the influence of language is, however, expressed in two ways: as an enhanced capacity for speech and as a particular view of the world. Man learns to master his thought in a better and more certain

^{3E}The development of social institutions - according to Humboldt - has to be judged from a different perspective than development in language: even though both bear witness to the striving for moral perfection, the former are rather material, i.e. undialectic and therefore finite, the development in language however dialectic and therefore infinite. (Cf. Liebrucks 1965:269f)

manner, to mould his thought into new and stimulating forms, and to reduce the effect of the fetters placed on the speed and unity of pure thought by a language which separates and combines, and which can only express one element after another. But in so far as language, in denoting things, is actually creating and giving form and character to thought as yet undefined, mind, supported by the activity of the many, is provided with new ways of exploring the essence of things.

That which continues in long sequences of alternating causes and effects has a particular right to belong to the history of the world, all the more so as it affects the entire substance of humanity more closely. That is why I said previously that the difference between languages would achieve historical relevance to the extent that it influences and determines the working of the human mind in the way I have described. For past and present are not merely linked by the succession of intermediary generations, between which language provides, as it were, a source of continuous procreation, but also by spirit, which, recorded in writing, directly links ages and distant lands together.

Languages and the differences between them must therefore be considered a dominant force in the history of mankind, and if one overlooks these or has a less than pure or limited grasp of this force, then one will have an incomplete concept of the way in which mankind wrested from the realm of ideas the intellectual mass - if I may be permitted the term - with such definition and clarity. In fact, the most important thing will be lacking, for language has its most immediate effect at the point at which the creation of the objective thought and the enhancing of the subjective force emerge from each other in a process of mutual enrichment. This deficiency cannot be overcome merely by observing either the effect of the progress nations have made in science and art, or the effect of the links between their respective literatures. There is more to the matter than simply the impact of language, whilst not every aspect of language is involved in this context.^{4E}

^{4E} Languages have to be seen as important forces in the history of mankind because of their scope, which extends from the most trivial of everyday necessities to the most sublime. This is achieved by the fact that the word is not precise, that it only gives an indication concerning the area in which the meaning might be located. See also "Latium and Hellas oder Betrachtungen über das klassische Alterthum" (1806) (Humboldt III:169). (Cf. Liebrucks 1965:242f)

When viewed from this perspective, the different languages occupy spheres of influence of varying dimensions. Some must be acknowledged as having contributed in essential ways to our present level of culture, and as belonging to the series of developments by means of which culture has progressed since the most distant past. Other languages have created a more isolated realm of intellectual development for themselves without any immediate link to our own. Many have either not reached the level of development at which products of the intellect are forthcoming, or have already fallen from such heights. These are therefore only important in the present context in so far as they belong to the history of other related languages or provide individual examples which demonstrate the varying states of the civilization of nations. For it is our task to show, by this consideration of languages in the context of world history, how language, which derived from necessity and the sounds of primitive nature, has become the creator and preserver of the most lofty and subtle achievements of mankind.

According to the difference between their respective fates, and also according to their links and affinities with other languages, one should be able to isolate and juxtapose the languages known to us, to ascertain their character, to investigate the causes of that character in their structure, and to appreciate their historical significance.

However, to avoid losing oneself in imprecise and fluctuating concepts, it is first of all necessary to establish in a general sense wherein the differences between the characteristics of languages can lie and to elucidate this with examples. It is necessary to establish both in the force that creates thought through the medium of language, as well as in thought itself, the features of language and the particular qualities of its structure which cause the individual character of a language to arise. In fact, such investigations should have preceded any description of the way in which languages can be treated historically in accordance with the influence of their particular character, for such investigations alone would have determined whether this influence could be measured with the degree of precision appropriate to such a treatment of the subject.

I have deliberately reversed the natural sequence, because I am particularly concerned to show how important and essential the comparative study of language is for an insight into the totality of mankind's intellec-

tual activity; to neglect it is to leave a significant and visible gap in that insight. For there are still far too many people who measure the value of studying a language simply according to the value of its literature, who consider the study of languages which do not possess any literature to be nothing more than the satisfaction of idle academic curiosity, and find the investigation of sounds, words, and inflexions trivial and unworthy of philosophical treatment. The matter is nevertheless very simple. If it is true - and on the whole our experience already makes us increasingly inclined to be convinced of this - that the mere individuality of a language exerts an influence on the character of nations, not only on those to which it belongs but also on those who are acquainted with it as a foreign language, then the meticulous study of language may not be excluded from anything that is concerned, both in history and in philosophy, with man's innermost being. But as language only works through itself, one must study it for its own sake and independently of any other aim, just as one would study any subject one wishes to examine properly. This view of language not as a means to understanding but as an end in itself, as the instrument of a nation's thought and feeling, is the basis of all genuine study of language, which is quite distinct in essence from any other acquisition of a language, however thorough. This study of language as such is like that of any other natural object. As far as possible it must encompass every category, as each belongs to the concept as a whole; it must undertake the most subtle analysis of the constituent parts, for the totality the impact of a language is only made up of the ever recurring effect of these constituent parts. It is now important to answer the question as to the way in which the diverse characteristics of language can have a broadening and uplifting effect on man's awareness and feeling.

Language has a threefold aim which reflects the intensity of its effectiveness:

- 1) it facilitates communication, and therefore requires clarity and precision;

- 2) it evokes and gives expression to feeling, and therefore requires forcefulness, refinement, and suppleness;
- 3) it has a creative influence itself in that it gives form to ideas and thus encourages new ideas and combinations of such. In this respect it requires the participation of the intellect, which leaves its impression on words as a sign of its activity.

One language may be distinguished from another either by a prominent strength in one of these types of effectiveness or by a weakness in others, but in fact each of the types requires the others; as soon as one of them comes to exclude the others it loses its way, and clarity becomes sober but empty, the expression of sentiment becomes bloated and fastidious, depth of meaning becomes brooding and obscure. If the particular quality of a language is to be free of these faults, it must be based on an appropriate degree of harmony between the three types of effect, whereby one of them is nevertheless the prevailing one.

Language expresses thought and feeling as objects, but it also follows the movement of thought and feeling, the rapidity and the uniformity or otherwise of these processes; and it also follows the curious elective affinities, according to which thoughts and feelings are linked together in different nations. Both the formal accompanying of man's thinking and the material expression of the individual thought have the reciprocal effect of fostering but also limiting one another. Any expression which is too laden with the content of man's inner thoughts inhibits the lightness and suppleness of language, whilst a flexibility which is too facile takes from the weight of the expression.

Man thinks, feels, and lives only in language and it is through language that he must first of all be educated in order to understand art, which does not derive its effect through the medium of language. Yet he feels and knows that it is only a means, that beyond it there is an invisible realm in which he can only hope to be at home with the help of language. The most mundane of feelings and the most profound of thoughts both lament the inadequacy of language; they see that realm, to which only language leads without ever attaining it, as a far off land. All higher use

lament the inadequacy of language; they see that realm, to which only language leads without ever attaining it, as a far off land. All higher use of language wrestles with thought, in which awareness of the power of language alternates with the longing for more perfect expression.

From this situation arise two highly remarkable differences between languages: the one arising from the degree to which the inadequacy of language is felt and from the endeavour to overcome this, the other from the variety of prevailing attitudes revealed by the mode a language has for denoting things - for the diversity of objects, combined with man's various organs of perception, allows an indeterminate number of such attitudes.

Some nations are seemingly content with the picture of the world which their language designs for them, and merely seek to give this picture more light, coherence and balance. Others seem to follow the more laborious course of burying themselves in their thought, believing it impossible to give either full or accurate expression to their ideas, and in the process they neglect the intrinsic formal perfection of language. In both instances the languages bear the mark of such an imbalance, but even here there are certain fine differences. The nations which are more concerned with the form, even if the content may suffer, may at times prefer to seek a logical form which demands clarity and ease of comprehension in particular, but may at other times seek a more sensuous form which appeals to the imagination.

The other kind of difference between languages, which arises from the mode of denoting things, is based on the interpretation of objects and of the concepts which are formed from them. Notwithstanding the infinite variety of these, there is in all of them, because they are comprehended by one nation, a similarity of appearance which makes itself felt in the words as signs. One might characterize this in rather imprecise fashion by saying that the words of one language possess more sensuous vividness, that in another there is more inner spiritual quality, or that in yet a third language there is more sober presentation of concepts, etc., but the diversity, and, above all, the particular quality of understanding in the mode of denotation cannot be captured in such generalizing expressions. None of the characteristics mentioned above are found in isolation, and,

even where they are found together in a number of nations, they are never identical in any two nations. One must study the particular characteristics of nations, one must study their works and the constituent parts of their language, and then allow one's feeling to develop a picture of all this, before attempting, as best one can, to clothe this picture in words. The language is also affected by the kind of objects and feelings which impinge most on the nation's consciousness, either as a general rule or when, at its earliest stage of existence, its language received its initial form.

Language, particularly with regard to the differences so far discussed, can in one respect be compared to art, for like art, it seeks to represent what is invisible in material form. For even if in individual instances and in its everyday use language does not appear to rise above the level of reality, there is nevertheless always a complete picture of the totality of phenomena present within it and, moreover, of the invisible links and affinities between them. Like an artist's painting, therefore, it remains more or less true to nature, choosing at times to hide and at other times to reveal its art, and preferring to depict its particular subject in either this or that shade of colour.

On the other hand, however, language is to a certain extent the opposite of art, for it only considers itself to be the means to depict something, whilst art, which destroys ideal and reality in so far as they occur separately, sees its work as replacing both of them. From this more restricted quality of language as a mere sign, there arise other differences in the character of language. One language shows more traces of intensive use and of agreement on meaning or reveals a more arbitrary quality, whilst another has been allowed to develop more naturally, something which can be seen in particular in the derivation of meaning in different words and also in the case of identical words. Apart from the words which denote the actual object of thought and feeling, there are elements in every language whose sole purpose is to link and to serve a grammatical function. It is the reciprocal relationship of these two parts of language which determines the way in which concepts are presented to the mind, whether in a more compact or loose form, whether in a smooth or more abrupt and disjointed form. The reason for this, the possibility or inevitability of the one or other linguistic character, lies in the original stable structure of

language; the consequences, however, are to be found in the most sophisticated and most highly developed workings of the intellect.

In accordance with the particular way in which languages are formed, they are suited to various types of intellectual activity to differing degrees. But it would be incorrect to do what has indeed been attempted, namely, to divide languages into categories on this basis, to seek to apportion some languages to literature, others to philosophy and others to directly practical activity. If a language, which it seems should most appropriately be devoted to the investigation of an abstract truth, is not conducive to the writing of literature, this cannot be attributed to its philosophical tendency, nor would the converse be the case; in fact other factors are at work, not the positive qualities of a language, but its faults. Even philosophy, embracing in its profundity the entire essence of things, will not be truly fostered through the medium of such a language. For all these manifestations of the principal intellectual forces lend support and assistance to one another and resemble rays emanating from a focal point. If one wishes to divide intellectual striving in the way it in fact appears divided in language, one must, if I may be permitted to use such a comparison, do so in the vertical rather than in the horizontal plane. The way in which the intellect, present to itself and free of any one-sidedness, dominates language, the way in which it seeks to come close to the very basis of all insight and feeling, has, at every stage it reaches, an analogous effect on each of the courses it takes.

From everything which has so far been said, it is clear that what primarily renders the differences in the character of languages visible is the intellectual mentality and therefore the mode of thinking and feeling. The influence of this on man's subjectivity is undeniable. Hence the particular quality of any language is most readily expressed in its literary works - in which the intellect is only slightly or not at all inhibited by the nature of a given subject; or, in an even more natural way, in the active life of the people and in the types of literature influenced by this. The most beautiful and expressive way in which the individuality of a language emerges, however, is in philosophical discourse, in which it draws the discovery of objective truth from the harmonious stimulation of the most noble subjectivity. Feeling takes on the peace and gentleness of thought, thought takes on the warmth and colour of feeling, the most serious and profound preoccupation of the mind is its intentionality and aim, pursued with ease

and joyful spontaneity. For this type of social intercourse to blossom, the humanity of a nation must have been intensified by miraculously fortunate circumstances, and the strength of a language must lie precisely in the close affinity of the objective and the subjective, whereby the former retains the upper hand without offending the rights of the latter. The dialogue, in which the different elements mesh with one another in a lively fashion and in which there is a genuine exchange of ideas and sentiments, is already in its own right the focal point of language, whose nature can only be understood in terms of sound and echo, speech and reply, and which both in its original form and in subsequent changes never belongs to one man but to everyone, and which lies deep within the mind of every man but only emerges in social intercourse. The suitability of languages for this form of discourse is consequently the best measure of its value, and only language which is conspicuous in this respect will always possess the most natural assets and present the most straightforward and the richest opportunities for the greatest variety of usage.

Man's subjectivity, determined and conditioned by language, influences the objects of the mind, man's thought and feeling, his insights and convictions; the extent of this is easy to measure, because the greater and more varied the stimulation the more is achieved.

On the other hand it does not seem as if truly objective cognition can profit from a knowledge of diverse languages once the power of thought in one language has acquired the sharpness and clarity necessary for the perception of truth.

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The brevity of this bibliography reflects the limits we have set ourselves in preparing this edition: we do not see it as our task to go any further into the history of the anglophone reception of Humboldt or into his reception elsewhere in the world; nor do we wish to enter into the discussion of Neo-Humboldtianism, Linguistic Relativism etc.

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